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Perpetrator Blame Attribution in Heterosexual Intimate Partner Violence: The Role of Gender and Perceived Injury

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Abstract

Gender asymmetry in intimate partner violence (IPV) is a well-supported phenomenon in research and clinical work. However few studies examine the influence of gender and perceived injury on blame attribution in third-party observers. Partner violence resulting in physical injury is thought to be more serious, and therefore, men are blamed more than women for perpetrating the same offence, as they are often perceived to be stronger and more capable of inflicting injury. The current vignette study used a 2x2x3 mixed-model design in order to examine the influence of perpetrator and observer gender, and weapon presence on observer blame. Participants were randomly assigned the male or female perpetrator condition. They were then given vignettes depicting an IPV scenario, which included either no weapon, a bottle, or a gun. A split-plot analysis of variance produced a significant main effect of perpetrator gender and an interaction effect of perpetrator gender and weapon presence. Strengths and limitations of the study are examined along with possible avenues for future exploration. The work done in the present study is important as it contributes to the understanding of community attitudes toward IPV, which in turn drive policy work and education ensuring that social perceptions are in line with clinical realities.

KEYWORDS: intimate partner violence; gender asymmetry; weapons; domestic violence; blame attribution; victimization; observer attitudes

Summary for Lay Audience

The gender divide in intimate partner violence (IPV) is a well-supported phenomenon in research and clinical work. However, there is less information about how observers of such violence are influenced by perpetrator gender, observer gender, and anticipated injury when placing blame on an IPV perpetrator. This study randomly assigned participants into two categories, male or female perpetrator. In each category, the participant (observer) was given 3 hypothetical scenarios, each included either no weapon, a gun, or a glass bottle. Perpetrator blame was assigned based off of several questions presented after each vignette. The results of the data analysis indicated that male perpetrators were blamed more than female perpetrators. Also, blame in the weapon scenarios were different based on whether the perpetrator was a man or woman. Finally, strengths and limitations of the study were examined along with possible avenues for future work. Intimate partner violence research involving community attitudes is important, it drives rules and laws surrounding violence prevention, as well as educates the public on the realities of IPV.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1. Introduction

1.1 Blame Attribution in Partner Violence-Overview

Intimate partner violence (IPV) is a complex issue characterized by acts of abuse committed by a current or former romantic partner (World Health Organization [WHO], 2012). The definition of IPV and its associated terms has evolved over the years. Early conceptions of domestic violence focused on physical abuse committed within a marriage, where the husband was always the perpetrator and the wife was always the victim. Today, it is more commonly accepted that IPV occurs outside of historical gender confines (Sorenson & Thomas, 2009) and includes abusive behaviours that extend beyond physical abuse (WHO, 2012). Despite this shift in awareness, traditional perceptions of IPV persist in the realms of the criminal justice system, research, and society. How interpersonal violence is conceptualized is thus subjective and socially constructed, with the status of ‘victim’ and ‘perpetrator’ determined by individuals, and the society in which they live (Kuijpers et al., 2017). Understanding perceptions of individuals who may not have direct experience with IPV is important for several reasons. Policy work and education groups rely on social constructions of partner violence in the community to form services and programs that prevent future violence (Eigenberg & Policastro, 2015). Additionally, past research has shown that individuals who are victims of IPV usually turn to the people around them when they seek advice (Greenberg & Ruback, 1992). This underscores the importance of understanding and addressing laypeople’s existing biases, so they can better provide informed advice. Several determinants of how individuals perceive IPV scenarios, and the agents in them have been studied in various contexts. Victim provocation (Esqueda & Harrison, 2005; Rhatigan et al., 2011; Stewart et al., 2012), substance use (Harrison & Esqueda, 2000), victim aggression (Witte et al., 2006), victim traditionality (Capezza & Arriaga, 2008a), and type of violence (Taylor & Sorenson, 2005) are some of the characteristics that can shape a third-party observer’s perceptions of an IPV scenario. However, recent research has focused on the gender dynamics associated with public IPV perceptions. Gender serves as a lens through which individuals view their environment. Although interchangeably used with sex, gender refers to the socially constructed ideas about how men and women should act (Russell et al., 2016). Thus, responses to IPV are shaped by the dynamic of the genders involved in the violence and also the observer’s gender (Allen & Bradley, 2017).

In the field of IPV, a debate persists that focuses on the real or perceived gender asymmetry of violence. One school of thought relies on the feminist perspective which maintains that IPV is exclusively perpetrated by men as a way to control women (Dobash et al., 1992). On the other hand, the gender symmetry approach which is also known as the family violence perspective, supports the idea that men and women perpetrate IPV at similar rates (Archer, 2000). While the general incidences of IPV may be similar, women who are victimized tend to be affected more than men. This notion is supported by female IPV victims having more severe injuries, requiring more time off work, and a greater use of health and justice services (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000; as cited in Flynn & Graham, 2010). There is no simple answer to the gender symmetry debate, as there are varied methods of defining and measuring IPV, and also an array of context-specific variables (e.g., bidirectional violence; Kuijpers et al., 2017). While actual levels of perpetration potentially differ by gender, social attitudes surrounding IPV are partially constructed via gender norms and beliefs, regardless of true IPV perpetration rates. Stereotypical views of women as weak and fragile, and men as aggressive and strong are inherently tied to how perpetration and victimization are also conceived (Scarduzio et al., 2017). Within the context of a heterosexual relationship, this could lead to hesitation when ascribing the role of ‘victim’ to a man and ‘perpetrator’ to a woman (Hine et al., 2020; Scarduzio et al., 2017). Therefore, observer attitudes are determined by not only the gender of either the perpetrator or victim, but the stereotypes and assumptions surrounding the dynamics between genders of *both* perpetrator and victim in heterosexual IPV.

Male rather than female perpetrators are often attributed more blame in IPV scenarios by third-party observers when committing the same offense (Rhatigan et al., 2011; Russell et al., 2016; Sorenson & Taylor, 2005). One rationale for this judgement is that the level of injury is worse when a man is executing the violence as they are often thought to be more capable of inflicting serious injury (Rhatigan et al., 2011). Conversely, a female victim is thought to be more susceptible to such injury (Seelau & Seelau, 2005). Further, IPV resulting in injury is recognized as more serious (Katz & Arias, 2001), suggesting that injury or the perceived threat of injury impacts how observers regard perpetrators of IPV. The threat of having a weapon present in an IPV situation, whether it is used or not, is linked to an increased level of injury and overall threat level (Sorenson & Taylor, 2005). Thus, the introduction of weapons to an IPV

scenario could negate observer biases associated with a perpetrator or victim's gender (Rhatigan et al., 2011).

The aim of the present study is to explore the impact of gender and the perceived threat of harm or injury on perceptions of perpetrator blame in heterosexual IPV. Observer perceptions of IPV are represented by blame, or how observers attribute responsibility to IPV perpetrators (Malle et al., 2014). According to Witte et al. (2006), cause, responsibility, and blame are terms that have all been used to assess IPV attributions in past research. Despite being similar, they are distinct terms; however, laypeople do not tend to differentiate between the concepts (Shaver & Drown, 1986). The subsequent literature review will provide the foundation for the current study which explores gender and weapon presence as determinants of perpetrator blame attribution in heterosexual IPV. First, significant research will be presented with the focus being on how observer attitudes are shaped by victim gender, perpetrator gender, observer gender, and the severity of violence.

Victim Gender. When assessing a situation where a man is the victim of partner violence, perceivers will tend to view the violence as ambiguous and more difficult to interpret (Harris & Cook, 1994). The male victim poses a challenge to society, as individuals have to reassess how they interpret what it means to be a victim. According to Christie (1986), to be considered an 'ideal' victim, there must be a clear difference in power between the perpetrator and the victim, the victim must act virtuously and be blameless, and the victim and perpetrator should not be acquainted. As a result, this conceptualization of victimhood has an impact on how one might decide whether an individual fits the status of 'victim' based on their gender. Hegemonic masculinity refers to the idealized version of masculinity. It focuses on the male having dominance over a female and includes other characteristics such as physical strength, aggression, rationality, and control (Durfrey, 2011). Therefore, the norm of the masculine male attacking a weak and vulnerable woman has serious implications for how male victims of IPV are perceived and also how men recognize their own victim status (Durfrey, 2011; Hine, 2019). In fact, when asked to imagine hypothetical aggressive acts perpetrated against them by an opposite-sex partner, undergraduate males considered fewer acts as abusive compared to females. One explanation for this is that there is a lesser degree of perceived physical harm from a female assailant, and that men are conceivably more equipped to physically protect themselves (Russell et al., 2016). Alternatively, men could conceive these acts as painful, but act according

to expectations of masculinity they minimize the abuse, not wanting to be deemed ‘weak’ (Arnocky & Vaillancourt, 2014).

In their vignette study examining IPV perceptions with a large community sample, Sorenson and Thomas (2009) found that compared to heterosexual women, gay men, and lesbians, heterosexual male victims were the least likely to be deemed deserving of protections and IPV interventions. Further, participants were less likely to report that the violence was illegal, that police should be called, and that a restraining order should be sought when the violence was against a heterosexual man. The authors suggest that’s this is tied to a system of structural power, whereby those with less power are considered more “worthy” victims (Sorenson & Thomas, 2009).

Taylor and Sorenson (2005) examined how observers held IPV perpetrators and victims accountable in hypothetical abusive scenarios in a large community sample study. Victim injury, weapon presence, victim rape, physical abuse, and perpetrator substance use decreased the odds of victim blame. Further, the likelihood of assigning fault to the victim was higher if the victim was a male, regardless of sexual orientation. There was also a greater likelihood of assigning equal fault when the victim was in a non-heterosexual relationship. This supports the idea that physical strength and the ability to cause injury have a role in observers’ attributions of responsibility in an IPV scenario. Third-party observers may mistakenly assume that since the couple is of the same sex they are matched in physical power and thus are not vulnerable to each other (Taylor & Sorenson, 2005).

In support of the notion that IPV toward heterosexual male victims is viewed as less serious, researchers asked undergraduate students to designate the labels of “victim” and “perpetrator” to the characters involved in bidirectional IPV vignettes (Hine et al., 2020). Interestingly, participants were aware of the bidirectional nature of the abuse scenarios, but evaluations of vignette characters were consistent with the same judgments used in unidirectional IPV. Participants were less likely to give the male in the scenario the label of “victim”, even when the majority of the aggression was perpetrated by the female partner. Further, scenarios in which the violence was male-dominated or those where there were equal levels of aggression, were both viewed as more serious than female-dominated scenarios. The findings from this study suggest that despite knowing the violence was bidirectional, participants made judgements based on preconceived ideas (Hine et al., 2020).

In order to gain a full understanding of how men conceptualize their own victimization and masculinity, Durfee (2011) examined court documents in which men applied for protection orders against their female abusers. According to hegemonic masculinity, the male should be in control and this was also evident in male victims' reports. Many conceded that they were assaulted but weren't "victims" and were still in control of the relationship. Additionally, despite recalling that they had to physically hold off their partner, male victims maintained that they were not the abuser. This illustrates the balance that needs to be kept by men, such that they cannot show physical hostility to their abuser without being viewed as the aggressor. The final theme present in the male victim's court documents was fear of the abuser. Although judging their situations dire enough to obtain a protection order, male victims were adamant that they did not express fear of their partner. The gender paradox faced by men when attempting to get help for IPV victimization is also present when women who are victims seek help. Often, women as victims are viewed as powerless, but when they attempt to get help in the form of assistance from the court system they are viewed as suspicious (Durfee, 2010). Like men, women also do not want to be portrayed as a victim, however both genders must navigate societal expectations of a social issue that is inherently gendered (Durfee, 2011).

The social norms that dictate how a victim ought to act also affect women's legitimacy as victims. Consequently, when women fight back against a perpetrator, they are judged more harshly than when they react passively to the violence (Branscombe & Weir, 1992). Social support and empathy are seemingly reserved for female victims who present as innocent and vulnerable, or in other words, as an 'ideal victim' (Meyer, 2015). This produces a catch-22 for women who are facing abuse; they are deemed suspicious for not getting out of the situation but are also not provided with full support when they don't fit societal expectations of a victim. This dilemma was considered in Terrence and colleagues' (2011) study; undergraduate participants viewed one of four police transcript interviews where the gender of the victim and perpetrator were manipulated, as well as the extent to which victims defended themselves against their attacker. In accordance with previous studies, women were thought to be in more danger than male victims. In addition, when the descriptions of the victims' injuries were held constant across the transcripts, participants still held different perceptions of the ability of the victim to defend themselves and the threat of the injury based on victim and perpetrator gender (Terrance et al., 2011). Intimate partner violence, which is often defined in a heterosexual context, remains

gender-based (Hannon, 2000). Common stereotypes surrounding men and women and how victimization is conceived negatively impacts victims, regardless of gender. As demonstrated, third-party observer views on IPV are greatly shaped by the victim's gender. However, the dynamic of the genders in heterosexual IPV allows for one to also consider the gender of the perpetrator when allocating blame.

Perpetrator Gender. Male violence committed against a female intimate partner is considered the most common type of abuse in society (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000). Further, women are more often victims in ongoing abuse and their violence can often be attributed to self-defense (Dasgupta, 2002). These factors reflect past findings that male-perpetrated violence is taken more seriously than female-perpetrated violence (Taylor & Sorenson, 2005). In their multi-study examination of implicit attitudes associated with gender and IPV, Bates and colleagues (2019) found that situations with a female perpetrator and male victim were less likely to be identified as partner violence. This pattern was also evident in reporting behaviours and explicit observer attitudes. Interestingly, when participants were provided information pertaining to equal rates of IPV between genders, it did not impact either implicit or explicit attitudes. This suggests deeply-ingrained associations and stereotypes when considering gender and IPV perpetration.

According to Snyder and Ickes (1985), how individuals construe a circumstance can be attributed to the “strength” of the situation. They describe situations with structure and evident clues to guide behaviour as “strong”. Alternatively, “weak” situations are therefore those that appear ambiguous and unstructured to the individual making the appraisal. As a result, strong situations are guided by situational characteristics and weak situations are guided by dispositional characteristics. In the context of the present matter and as a result of gender norms, a situation with a male perpetrator and female victim is a strong situation, with the observer being able to easily interpret the violence. However, when the roles are reversed and the female is the perpetrator the situation becomes more ambiguous (Witte et al., 2006). One way in which situations are strengthened is through exposure to similar experiences, and IPV is often publicly represented via the media. Scarduzio et al. (2017) qualitatively examined gender stereotypes of undergraduate students when exposed to IPV news stories depicting a heterosexual married couple. Four stereotypes emerged from the analysis: aggression, emotion, power and control, and acceptability of violence. In the aggression stereotype, participants described women as expressing aggression more often through less direct means, and men as expressing aggression

physically. In the emotional stereotype, men were depicted as one-dimensional in terms of their emotional range, as the male perpetrator's violence was often attributed to anger. On the other hand, the female perpetrator was viewed as overly emotional. This finding is consistent with Stewart and colleagues' (2012) study which identified perceptions that male perpetrators were more in control and behaviourally stable. Scarduzio et al. (2017) also identified views that men were physically strong and women were weak in the power and control stereotype. Participants expressed disbelief when a female perpetrator killed her male partner, and described a woman overpowering a man as amusing. Finally, in the acceptability stereotype, participants rated violence as never acceptable regardless of the perpetrator. However, when it came to violence in self-defence, it was acceptable for women but not men (Scarduzio et al., 2017). These stereotypes highlight the gender differences associated with IPV perpetration. Individuals will often express patterns in judgement that extend beyond the presented information. Individuals who are unable to conceive a female as a violent perpetrator will thus turn to other factors to explain their behaviour (Saunders, 2002).

In their large community study, Sorenson and Taylor (2005) surveyed adults in California about social norms in IPV. They included 12 variables in the vignette study, manipulating attributes of the incident, the perpetrator, and the victim. In accordance with past community and university samples (e.g., Sorenson & Thomas, 2009), violence committed by men was viewed as more illegal. Additionally, when a slap, punch, or forced sex was the type of violence in the vignette, it was considered more illegal when committed by a man than a woman. The authors also reported more structured responses with a male perpetrator and female victim. This provides additional support for male-on-female violence being a 'strong' situation as it seems to be more understood. Further, when a male committed the violent acts, respondents were more likely to endorse that legal interventions follow (e.g., arrests and protection orders). Minimizing perpetration has implications for women who aggress, such that inappropriate services may be suggested that fail to meet the unique needs of female perpetrators who are trying to change their behaviour (Bates et al., 2019).

The real or perceived injury incurred by a victim is thought to be more or less damaging based on the gender of the perpetrator. Further, sex is often confounded with gender identity and the stereotypes associated with the genders (Spence & Helmreich, 1979). A vignette study by Russell et al. (2016) aimed to untangle the effects of sex and gender identity on perpetrator

ability to arouse fear and observer blame. Participants read one of eight vignettes depicting a perpetrator with a knife in which the perpetrator and victim sex, and gender identity were manipulated. Perpetrator ability to arouse fear was positively correlated with blame. Feminine female perpetrators were the least likely to arouse fear and had the lowest blame levels. Moreover, blame levels for feminine female perpetrators were significantly lower than masculine male, feminine male, and masculine female perpetrators. This suggests that gender identity, rather than sex may lead observers to believe that women are not associated with physical aggression (Russell et al., 2016).

Observer Gender. In recent decades there has been an overall shift toward negative attitudes when it comes to partner violence for women and men (Wilchek-avid et al., 2018). However, previous research has supported a sex-of-perceiver effect which determines how victim and perpetrator attributions are made by third-party observers. Further, the socialization that occurs according to gender dictates how one ought to act (Langhinrichsen-Rohling et al., 2004). This distinction between how men and women conceptualize IPV is illustrated in O'Campo and colleagues' 2016 study. Using concept mapping, the study suggested that both men and women generally agreed that specific physical and sexual acts should be considered IPV. However, when it came to non-physical violent acts (e.g., controlling behaviours), there was less consensus between men and women.

These differences in attitudes also translate to blame attribution, A study conducted with college students found that women held the perpetrator more responsible for violent acts in a male-on-female IPV scenario than did men (Langhinrichsen-Rohling et al., 2004). One explanation for this difference is that men are more likely to support violent attributions than women. In order to account for observer attitudes towards female perpetrators, Wilchek-avid et al. (2018) examined severity and justification for both male and female perpetrators. Men did not significantly differ in their attributions toward violent men and women. However, women were more tolerant toward female rather than male perpetrators. Further, female participants perceived men's violence as more severe, but for the female perpetrator the violence was equally as severe according to men and women. These results can be viewed through the Defensive Attribution Theory (Shaver, 1970), whereby women who viewed the scenarios were likely to identify with a female victim, therefore attributing more severity to the violence in those situations (Wilchek-

avid et al., 2018). Conflicting these findings, other research supports women having greater rates of IPV justification (as cited in Kuijpers et al., 2017).

A recent study by Zapata-Calvente and Megías (2017) found that women may be more sensitive than men to acts of violence. Their study examined university students' attitudes towards hypothetical IPV scenarios. Interestingly, women rated the prevalence of violent acts as higher compared to men. Women also rated the violence as more serious as compared to male participants, for both male and female perpetrators. Additionally, women were shown to place more blame on the perpetrators. Merrill's Social Psychology Theory (1996) may account for the difference in how men and women view violence. Women are not socialized to be physically violent but are thought to be more perceptive of other's emotions and wellbeing (Zapata-Calvente & Megías, 2017).

While there are several studies that support the idea that men and women conceptualize IPV differently, there is no consensus on whether there is a difference in perceptions (Kuijpers et al., 2017; Sorenson & Taylor, 2005). According to Rhatigan et al. (2011), these conflicting findings may be accounted for by prior experience to IPV. Kuijpers and colleagues (2017) examined how university students perceived acceptability when viewing IPV scenarios. Prior IPV experience was controlled for with the Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS2) which examines physical and psychological abuse (Straus et al., 1996). Vignettes that depicted more severe violence (i.e., victim hit with a bunch of keys) were rated as less normal by women than men. However, when taking into account participant psychological but not physical IPV history, the gender differences in normality diminished.

Severity of Injury. The use of weapons in IPV is related to more serious injuries to the victim, and having a weapon present in an IPV situation increases the level of threat to the victim (Sorenson & Taylor, 2005). Despite this threat, the use of firearms is not common in domestic violence cases (Kernsmith & Craun, 2008), and they are most often used in a threatening manner (Sorenson, 2017). Folkes et al. (2012) found that for men who perpetrate IPV, use of any external weapons was associated with severity of violence used against their female partner. According to Sorenson's (2017) examination of 35,425 IPV cases from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, the use of a gun was more common when the assailant was a man. However, general weapon use (e.g., knife, phone, household object) was linked to female rather than male perpetrators by Kernsmith and Craun (2008). This increased weapon use by women may be

attributed to women needing to have additional protection as a means of self-defence against their physically stronger male partner, or as a way to make up for a lack of physical power when dominating their partner.

In their community study, Taylor and Sorenson (2005) identified that victim risk for injury was related to lower blame scores for victims by observers. Additionally, observers indicated that the conflicting couple should “talk” more often in cases where an assailant grabbed a nearby household object than when the perpetrator pulled out a gun. Moreover, in a separate study with the same sample (Sorenson & Taylor, 2005), respondents were more likely to consider the situation illegal when there were external weapons present in the scenarios. Observers most often reported that guns should be taken away from the perpetrator when they beat the victim and that police should intervene. These considerations were made regardless of whether the assailant was a male or female and demonstrate that situational context may be more important than perpetrator gender to how observers perceive IPV (Sorenson & Taylor, 2005). Situations involving weapons, especially guns, are considered “strong” rather than “weak.” Strong situations are severe and allow for observers to react in the same way. On the other hand, weak situations are less defined and allow for alternative interpretations. Some contextual elements in strong situations are important enough that other circumstances can be ignored (Witte et al., 2006). For example, having a gun in an IPV scenario may supersede any other factors in the vignettes, such as the gender of the perpetrator and victim. The existing literature is limited in its exploration of gender and varying weapons as determinants of observer blame attribution. The present study will extend the findings from previous research by including various forms of a perceived injury threat.

1.2. The Current Study

According to Sorenson and Taylor (2005), judgements about aggression are based on three categories: attributes of the people involved, attributes of the situation, and attributes of the observers making the judgement. The purpose of the present study is to examine the impact of gender and perceived threat of harm or injury on perceptions of perpetrator blame in heterosexual IPV. A quasi-experimental design was used with vignettes to examine how perpetrator gender (male/female), weapon presence (no weapon/gun/bottle), and observer gender (male/female) relate to blame attribution.

1.3. Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: Male participants will assign significantly less blame to the perpetrator in the scenarios than female participants, regardless of perpetrator gender or the presence of a weapon.

Hypothesis 2: Participants will assign significantly more blame to the male perpetrator than the female perpetrator for all weapon conditions.

Hypothesis 3: Participants will assign significantly more blame to the perpetrator when there is an external weapon present, compared to when there is no weapon present, regardless of perpetrator gender.

Hypothesis 3_a: Participants will assign significantly more blame to the perpetrator in the gun condition compared to the bottle and no weapon conditions, regardless of perpetrator gender

Chapter 2: Methods

2. Methods

2.1. Participants

A Priori Analysis. The power analysis was conducted with G*Power 3.1 and focused on the hypothesized effects using simple independent mean comparisons for gender of participant and perpetrator, and a dependent sample mean comparison for the weapon presence. First, an analysis was conducted to see how many participants would be needed to detect a main effect of observer gender on blame (H_1). In Rhatigan and colleagues' study (2011) a small effect size was found, therefore a small effect size ($d = 0.20$), along with $\alpha = .05$, and a power of .80 was used to conduct the analysis. The results indicated that in order to detect a main effect of observer gender on blame attribution a total of 788 participants would be needed. In order to see how many participants would be needed to find a main effect of perpetrator gender (H_2), a large effect size ($d = 0.80$; as determined by Rhatigan et al., 2011), $\alpha = .05$, and a power of .80 was used in the power test. The study would need at least 52 total participants to detect a statistical difference in blame scores for male and female perpetrators. There has not been any previous investigations with reported effect sizes on how the specific weapons used in this study impact blame attributions. For the analysis, a test of difference between two dependent means, a medium effect size of $d = 0.50$, $\alpha = .05$, and a power of .80 was used. In order to detect a main effect of weapon presence (H_3) 34 participants would be needed.

The total number of participants in this study was 335 (76.1% female) with 169 participants in the female perpetrator condition and 166 in the male perpetrator condition. The current sample did not meet the required sample size for a power of .80 as determined by the a priori analysis for the observer gender effect. Based on *post hoc* calculations, the current sample size achieved a power of .34. However, with an effect of $d = 0.36$ the sample would achieve a power of .80.

The make-up of the sample consisted of undergraduate (78%) and graduate students recruited from the Western University community through mass-email recruitment and the Psychology Research Participation Pool (SONA). Participants ranged in age from 17 to 59 ($M = 20.98$, $SD = 5.84$). The majority of participants identified as White/Caucasian (57.6%), followed by 19.4% identifying as East or Southeast Asian, 6.6% as South Asian, and 4.2% as West Asian/Arab. According to the participants at the time of data collection, 59.4% reported that they

were single, 31.6% reported being in a dating relationship, 5.4% were married, and 3.6% were engaged. A subset of the sample also indicated that they had experienced lifetime IPV victimization (13.1%) and/or perpetration (4%). Participants who indicated IPV perpetration were more often women (64%) than men (35%). Participants that indicated IPV victimization were also more often women (88%) than men (11%).

2.2. Vignettes

The vignettes used to depict an IPV scenario in this study were adapted from a previous study conducted by Rhatigan and colleagues (2011) on confrontation and blame. The hypothetical vignettes depict a violent situation between cross-sex dyads who are intimate partners. The control non-confrontational vignettes were adapted for this study to assess how the presence of a weapon would impact observer blame attribution by inserting a weapon into the vignettes. For the gun condition, two sentences were added, (“You see [perpetrator] reach for a drawer and pull out a gun...”) and (“You witness [perpetrator] press the gun to [victim’s] chest and yell...”). Likewise, two additional sentences were added in the bottle condition, (“You see [perpetrator] reach for an empty glass bottle on the counter”) and (“You witness [perpetrator] smash the bottle on the counter and hold it up to [victim’s] face and yell...”). The perpetrator gender was manipulated by changing the names of the hypothetical couple and using appropriate gendered pronouns. In the male perpetrator condition Robert was the IPV perpetrator and Maria was the victim, and in the female perpetrator condition, Maria was the perpetrator and Robert was the victim (see Appendix B for vignettes).

2.3. Measures

Domestic Violence Blame Scale. The Domestic Violence Blame Scale (DVBS) was developed by Petretic-Jackson and colleagues (1994) for the purpose of assessing individual blame attribution in IPV which covers several domains (societal, situational, perpetrator, and victim; see Appendix D for full measure). The original 23-item scale conceptualizes IPV as physical violence where the husband is the perpetrator, and the wife is the victim. For the purposes of this study the scale was modified to include gender-neutral terms. For example, “Husbands who physically assault their wives should be locked up” was changed to “Perpetrators who physically assault their partners should be locked up.” The items are scored in Likert-scale format, such that “1” represents strong disagreement and “6” represents strong agreement. According to Petretic-Jackson et al. (1994) the scale has acceptable validity and

reliability (as cited in Bryant & Spencer, 2003). Cronbach's alpha in the present sample was acceptable at $\alpha = .72$. The purpose of including this scale was to gather data on participants' baseline blame attribution before they were presented with the vignettes. The mean score for the scale was used as a covariate in the analyses.

Attributions for Violent Behaviour. The Attributions for Violent Behaviour (AVB) scale was developed by Rhatigan et al. (2011) to assess observer responsibility, blame, and causality in IPV scenarios. This measure was based on Fincham and Bradbury's Relationship Attribution Measure (1992) and theoretical distinctions of types of attribution related to blame. Item examples are: "(Perpetrator) is responsible for the violent act(s) portrayed above" and "I believe that (Perpetrator's) behavior was a one-time event and won't happen again." The 11-item scale is scored in Likert-type format and ranges from "1" = disagree strongly to "6" = agree strongly, with a higher score indicating more blame being placed on the perpetrator in the scenario. Additionally, items 3, 4, 5, and 7 on the scale are reverse coded. The internal consistency reliability is shown to be high ($\alpha = .75$; Rhatigan et al., 2011). According to a reliability analysis with the present sample, the AVB scale produced an alpha of $\alpha = .68$. For the purpose of this study the AVB scale was used to assess the dependent variable, perpetrator blame attribution.

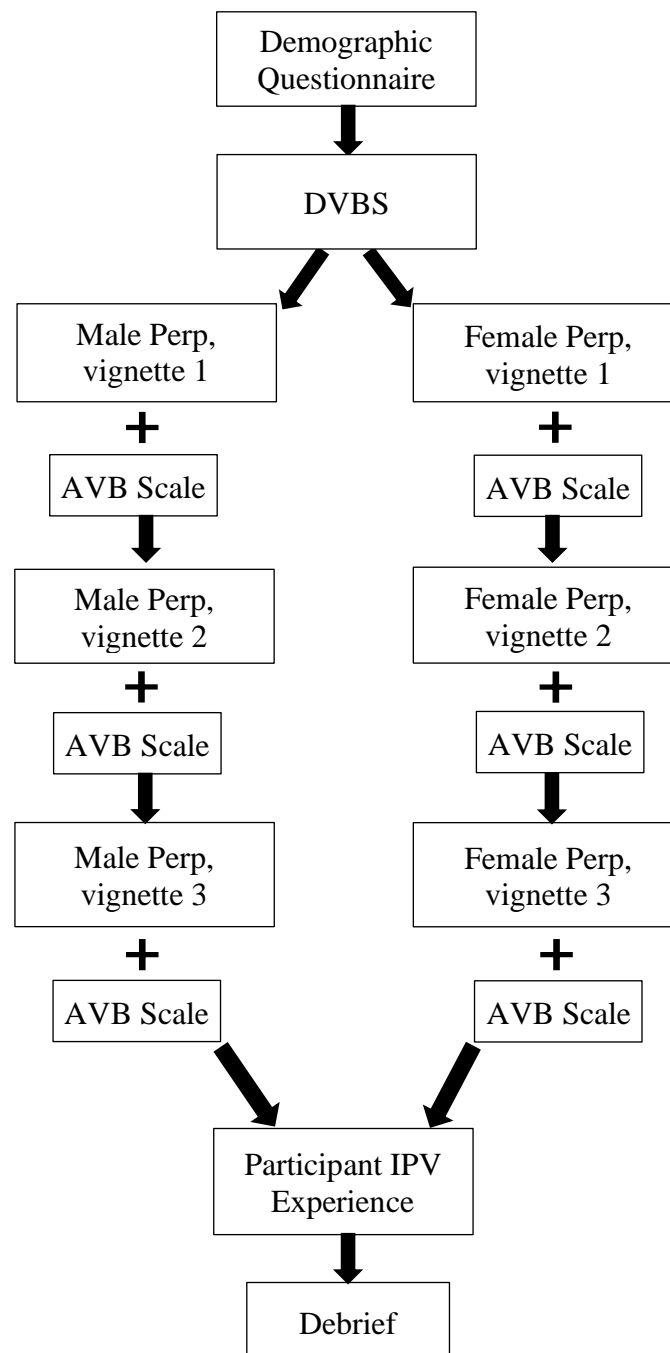
Demographic Questionnaire. Preceding the vignettes and blame scales, participants answered questions relating to several demographic variables. Information on gender, race/ethnicity, year of study, relationship status, and length of current relationship was collected. Following the completion of the vignette task, participants answered questions relating to their IPV history. Data on history of victimization ("In your life, do you feel that you have ever been a victim of intimate partner violence?") and history of perpetration ("In your life, do you feel that you have ever been a perpetrator of intimate partner violence that was not in self-defence?") were collected from participants.

2.4. Procedure

The Western University Research Ethics Board was responsible for approving the present study (Project ID: 116357). Recruitment was collected through Western's SONA pool and through Western's Mass E-mail Recruitment service. The participants accessed the link to the study, which was conducted on Qualtrics, and were presented with the letter of information which outlined the purpose of the project, risks and benefits, and contact information. Consent

was obtained through the participant checking a box which stated that they understood the prior information and agreed to voluntarily participate in the study. All participants were then asked to fill out the demographic questionnaire, as well as the Domestic Violence Blame Scale.

Participants were randomly assigned to either the male or female perpetrator conditions, each containing 3 vignettes with varying weapons. The no weapon, bottle, and gun conditions were counterbalanced to control for order effects, and after reading each IPV vignette the participant was prompted to complete the AVB scale. The study concluded by asking about the participant's experience of IPV with two yes/no questions. Finally, participants were redirected to the debrief letter which contained literature on the related topic, the study hypotheses, contact information, and resources for participants who could have experienced distress from completing the study (see Figure 1 for study flow). Compensation in the form of 0.5 research credits was given to participants who were recruited through SONA. No other form of compensation was given. The entire study had an expected completion time of 20 minutes.

Figure 1*Study Flow*

Note. Participants were randomly sorted into the male perpetrator or female perpetrator conditions after completing the DVBS. The within-subjects weapon factor consisted of the three vignettes (no weapon, bottle, and gun) presented in a randomized order for each participant.

CHAPTER 3: RESULTS

3. Results

3.1. Data Screening

In advance of completing the primary data analyses, several steps were taken in order to clean the data set. Immediately after downloading the data from Qualtrics, identifiable details were removed including participant IP addresses, automatically generated response IDs, latitude and longitudes, SONA IDs, and survey IDs. Two cases were deleted as the individuals indicated that they did not consent to participate in the study. Participant progress was examined and only participants who completed more than 90% of the study were kept, with 90 cases being deleted. The eliminated cases had not completed a sufficient amount of the study conditions or they ended the study before they got to the vignettes. Prior to the data analysis, the decision was made to include only data from participants who completed 2 out of 3 weapon conditions. The data were then coded with blank data recorded as “-99” within the dataset. Finally, mean scores were computed for each of the weapon conditions and the study measures, and descriptive statistics were run. Individuals that did not identify as either male or female ($n = 4$) were not included in the analysis.

The mean AVB scale scores for perpetrator blame were examined for normality by viewing the skewness and kurtosis statistics prior to and following the removal of outliers. In the no weapon, male perpetrator condition the data were shown to be non-normally distributed with a skewness of -1.62 ($SE = 0.19$) and kurtosis of 4.49 ($SE = 0.38$). In the gun, male perpetrator condition the data were also shown to be non-normally distributed with a skewness of -1.60 ($SE = 0.19$) and kurtosis of 3.46 ($SE = 0.38$). Finally, in the bottle, male perpetrator condition the data were also shown to be non-normally distributed with a skewness of -1.62 ($SE = 0.19$) and kurtosis of 4.53 ($SE = 0.38$). The data were then assessed for extreme outliers which were defined as $3 \times IQR$ (interquartile range) using boxplots in SPSS. Scores for each weapon condition were individually assessed and mean score data points from nine extreme outliers and one participant falling outside of $3 \times IQR$ were removed. A second inspection of skewness and kurtosis statistics was conducted after removal of the extreme outliers as outlying data often have an impact on skewness and kurtosis. The second analysis showed that the data were normally distributed.

3.2. Split-Plot ANOVA

Observer Blame. For the purpose of this study, a 2x2x3 split-plot (or mixed effects) design was used and all analyses were conducted in SPSS. Perpetrator gender was one between-subjects factor, participant gender was the second between-subjects factor, and the weapon condition was the within-subjects, repeated-measures factor. The covariates that were added into the model were the mean Domestic Violence Blame Scale scores and participant age. Mauchly's test of Sphericity was significant so a Greenhouse-Geisser epsilon adjustment was used for tests involving the repeated-measure factor vignette. No significant main effect of observer gender was found, $F(1, 307) = 0.033, p = .856, d = 0.00$. In the sample, men's blame scores ($M = 5.16, SD = 0.10$) did not significantly differ from women's ($M = 5.16, SD = 0.08$). This finding did not support the hypothesis that men would blame the perpetrator less than women (H_1), as there was no significant difference in blame attribution based on observer gender. There were no other significant interactions with participant gender. However, the DVBS covariate showed a significant value, indicating that DVBS scores were significantly related to perpetrator blame attribution, $F(1, 307) = 6.97, p = .009, \eta p^2 = 0.02$.

Table 1

Blame Scores by Participant Gender

	Participant Gender	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Skewness	Kurtosis
No Weapon	Female	240	5.08	0.49	-0.77	0.27
	Male	75	5.05	0.66	-0.87	0.21
	Total	315	5.07	0.54	-0.84	0.48
Gun	Female	240	5.24	0.46	-0.80	0.31
	Male	75	5.25	0.59	-1.34	2.26
	Total	315	5.25	0.49	-1.02	1.30
Bottle	Female	240	5.16	0.47	-0.83	0.50
	Male	75	5.17	0.66	-1.11	1.03
	Total	315	5.16	0.52	-0.97	1.06
Total	Female	225	5.16	0.08	-0.80	0.32
	Male	80	5.16	0.10	-1.18	1.33
	Total	335	5.16	0.48	-0.99	1.12

Weapon Presence. The gun condition had the highest mean ($M = 5.25, SD = 0.49$), followed by the bottle ($M = 5.16, SD = 0.52$), and then the no weapon condition ($M = 5.07, SD =$

0.54). However, according to the analysis there was no significant main effect of weapon presence on blame attribution after adjusting the degrees of freedom with the Greenhouse Geisser correction, $F(2, 590) = 1.58, p = .207, \eta p^2 = 0.005$.

Perpetrator Blame. The model showed a significant main effect of perpetrator gender, $F(1, 307) = 12.28, p = .001, d = 0.53, 95\% \text{ CI } [.097, .344]$. This supports H₂ indicating that male perpetrators ($M = 5.29, SD = 0.39$) were blamed significantly more than female perpetrators ($M = 5.04, SD = 0.53$).

Table 2

Blame Scores by Perpetrator Gender

	Perpetrator Gender	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Skewness	Kurtosis
No Weapon	Female	161	4.93	0.59	-0.55	-0.14
	Male	154	5.23	0.43	-0.97	1.27
	Total	315	5.07	0.54	-0.84	0.48
Gun	Female	161	5.15	0.54	-0.74	0.62
	Male	154	5.34	0.42	-1.33	2.67
	Total	315	5.25	0.49	-1.02	1.30
Bottle	Female	161	5.04	0.58	-0.70	0.31
	Male	154	5.29	0.40	-1.00	1.53
	Total	315	5.16	0.52	-0.97	1.06
Total	Female	169	5.04	0.53	-0.71	0.43
	Male	166	5.29	0.39	-1.17	2.17
	Total	335	5.16	0.48	-0.99	1.12

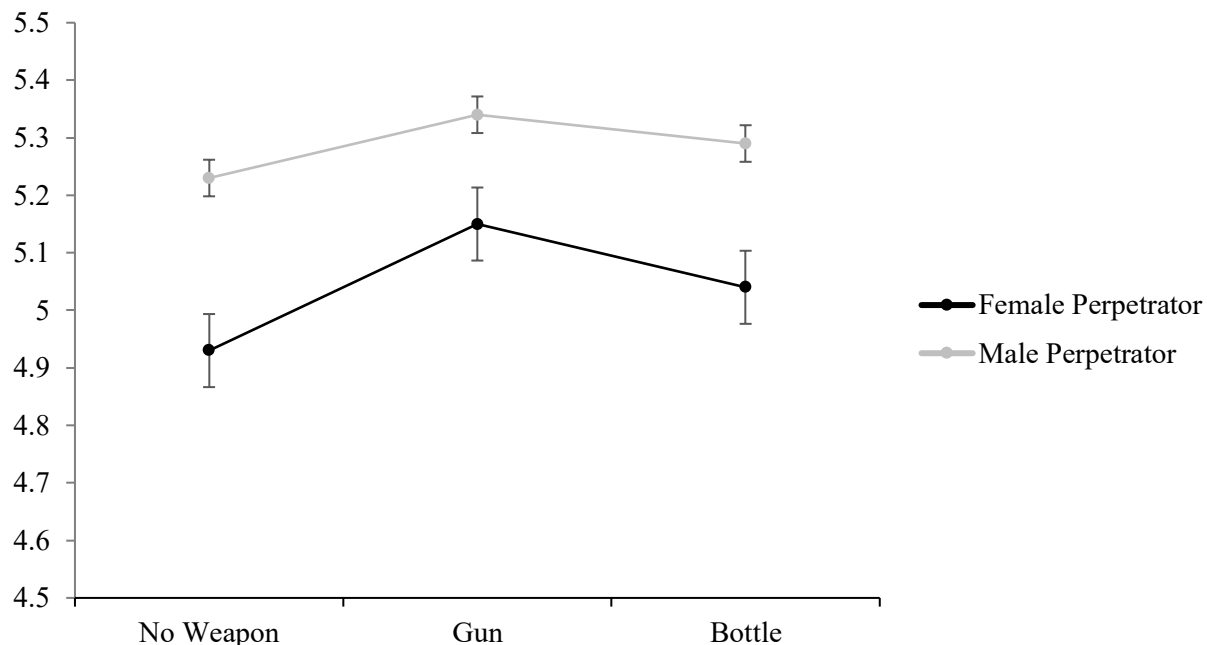
Perpetrator Gender and Weapon Presence Interaction. Although not hypothesized, there was a significant 2x3 interaction effect between perpetrator gender and weapon presence, $F(2, 590) = 5.09, p = .007, \eta p^2 = 0.016$, indicating that participants placed different levels of blame on the perpetrator in the weapon conditions based on whether the perpetrator was male or female.

In order to explore if each of the weapon conditions were significantly different from one another, holding constant perpetrator gender, three paired-samples *t*-tests were conducted for the male and female perpetrator conditions. A Bonferroni adjustment was applied (i.e..05/3) to reduce the risk of Type I error. Blame in the male no weapon condition was significantly lower than the male gun condition, $t(157) = -5.04, p = .000, d = 0.39, 95\% \text{ CI } [-.563, -.238]$. Blame in

the male bottle and male gun conditions did not differ significantly, $t(154) = -2.24, p = .027, d = 0.18$, 95% CI $[-.338, -.021]$. Blame in the male bottle and male no weapon conditions also did not differ significantly, $t(160) = -2.39, p = .018, d = 0.15$, 95% CI $[-.345, -.033]$. Blame scores were significantly higher in the female gun condition than in the female no weapon condition, $t(164) = -6.54, p = .000, d = 0.51$, 95% CI $[-.671, -.346]$. Blame scores were also significantly higher in the female bottle condition than in the female no weapon condition, $t(164) = 4.19, p = .000, d = 0.33$, 95% CI $[.170, .483]$. Finally, blame scores for the female gun condition were significantly higher than those in the female bottle condition, $t(160) = 3.96, p = .000, d = 0.30$, 95% CI $[.154, .470]$. There were no other significant effects in this model.

Figure 2

Perpetrator Gender and Weapon Presence Interaction



Note. Blame attribution mean scores as a function of perpetrator gender and weapon presence.

3.3. Secondary Analysis

Secondary analyses were conducted to explore whether lifetime experience of IPV victimization or perpetration had an effect on perpetrator blame attribution. An independent t -test indicated that there was no significant difference in blame for participants who indicated lifetime perpetrator experience compared to those with no perpetrator experience, $t(14) = 1.54, p = .144, d = 0.59$, 95% CI $[-.115, .708]$. Additionally, there was no significant difference found between

participants who reported victim experience and those who did not, $t(326) = 1.35, p = .176, d = 0.22, 95\% \text{ CI } [-.050, .274]$.

The same split-plot design was used as in the primary analysis. Perpetrator gender was one between-subjects factor, participant gender was the second between-subjects factor, and the weapon condition was the within-subjects, repeated-measures factor. The covariates that were added into the model were the mean DVBS scores and participant age. This model differs from the previous model as participant history of IPV victimization and perpetration were added as covariates. The assumption of sphericity was violated, so a Greenhouse-Geisser epsilon adjustment was used for tests involving the repeated-measure factor vignette. As with the previous model, there was a significant main effect of perpetrator gender, $F(1, 303) = 12.40, p = .000, d = 0.53$, such that the male perpetrators were blamed more than female perpetrators. There was also a significant interaction effect between weapon presence and perpetrator gender, $F(2, 579) = 4.86, p = .009, \eta^2 = 0.016$. Finally, there was a significant interaction between perpetrator experience and weapon presence, $F(2, 579) = 3.92, p = .022, \eta^2 = 0.013$.

Additionally, Domestic Violence Blame Scale scores were examined to explore the relationship between participant gender and general levels of perpetrator and victim blaming attitudes. An independent samples t -test was used to conduct the analysis, with the mean scores of the perpetrator blame subscale of the DVBS as the test variable, and participant gender as the grouping variable. Women ($M = 3.83, SD = 0.67$) and men ($M = 3.87, SD = 0.63$) did not differ in their level of IPV perpetrator blame, $t(333) = 0.423, p = .673, d = 0.05, 95\% \text{ CI } [-.132, .204]$. Gender was also examined with mean scores for the victim blaming subscale of the DVBS, with participant gender as the grouping variable. Men ($M = 1.78, SD = 0.63$) were more likely to hold victim-blaming attitudes than were women ($M = 1.59, SD = .54$), $t(114) = 2.81, p = .006, d = 0.39, 95\% \text{ CI } [.068, .393]$.

CHAPTER 4: DISCUSSION

4. Discussion

The present study examined observer blame attribution as a function of observer gender, perpetrator/victim gender, and weapon presence. Participants were given vignettes that depicted a violent scenario between a heterosexual couple, they then indicated perpetrator blame attribution using a Likert-type measure. The first hypothesis for this study was that male observers would assign less blame to the perpetrator than female observers would. This finding was not supported by the data, as there was no significant difference found between the amount of blame between men and women. This contrasts previous literature which suggests that men are more supportive of violent attributions (Langhinrichsen-Rohling et al., 2004; Rhatigan et al., 2011; Zapata-Calvente & Megías, 2017). Additionally, the lack of significant difference in blame between participant genders emerged regardless of perpetrator gender and past IPV experience. This does not support Shaver's Defensive Attribution Theory (1970), as participants did not seem to identify with the perpetrator or victim in the scenarios based on gender identity or IPV history. There seems to be a lack of consensus in whether gender alone can influence observer perceptions of IPV as some previous studies have also not found an effect of participant gender (Kristiansen & Giulietti, 1990; Lehmann & Santilli, 1996). Previous IPV experience has shown to affect participant perceptions of hypothetical IPV scenarios. While the current study did take into account past IPV perpetration and victimization, it did so by asking only two questions. Kuijpers et al. (2017) found that previous psychological but not physical IPV predicted attributions of IPV. However, the IPV screening questions did not make a distinction between the types of IPV participants had experience with. Physical violence is considered more important than non-physical violence to how individuals define IPV (O'Campo et al., 2016). Therefore, it is likely participants may have only considered physical IPV when answering these questions. It could be the case where if participant IPV history was more thoroughly examined (e.g., with validated measures), a gender difference would emerge in blame attribution. Another possible reason for these findings is that there were not enough participants to detect an effect. According to the *a priori* power analysis, additional subjects would have been required to find a difference in blame attribution between male and female participants. Moreover, the men and women in this sample may not have differed significantly in the overall tendency to blame an IPV perpetrator. When contrasting perpetrator blame subscale scores from the Domestic

Violence Blame Scale, males and females did not significantly differ. However, there was a difference in the victim blame scores, as men tended to victim blame more than women. The Attributions for Violent Behaviour scale, which was used to assess blame after the vignettes, focuses on perpetrator and not victim blame. This may also be a contributing factor as to why men and women did not differ significantly in their levels of perpetrator blame.

The second hypothesis indicated that participants would attribute more blame to the male perpetrator than the female perpetrator in each weapon condition. The results from this study support this hypothesis as more blame was placed on the male rather than the female perpetrator. This finding is also consistent with past research which indicates that male perpetrators are judged more harshly than female perpetrators (Allen & Bradley, 2017; Russell et al., 2016; Sorenson & Taylor, 2005; Sorenson & Thomas, 2009; Taylor & Sorenson, 2005). In the no weapon condition, more blame was attributed to the male perpetrator. This can be explained by the tendency for men to be thought of as physically stronger and women as weaker, and therefore the violence is thought to be more serious for the female victim (Rhatigan et al., 2011; Seelau & Seelau, 2005). Partner violence executed by men against women is thought to be more severe (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000); it is possible that because the injuries weren't stated in the vignettes, individuals conjure their own mental images of the possible injuries and judge men more harshly (Allen & Bradley, 2017). Another possible reason for why female perpetrators are blamed less than male perpetrators is because of the stereotype that women are considered more emotionally unstable than men (Stewart et al., 2012). This finding was also highlighted in Scarduzio and colleagues' study (2017) in which participants attributed women's violence to them having a lack of control over their emotions and thus their behaviour.

In the bottle condition where the victim was threatened with a broken glass bottle, the male perpetrator was attributed more blame. The smaller effect size may indicate the ability for the perpetrators to do similar damage, despite their gender. However, even with the added threat of perceived injury the male was attributed significantly more blame than the female perpetrator. Finally, when the victim was threatened with a gun, the male perpetrator was blamed more. This finding is interesting as there would be no difference in injury, a gun would be able to do the same damage to the victim regardless of who is using it. One explanation for the higher blame scores for men, despite the elevated threat of the weapon is that no actual injury was inflicted with the weapon. The inclusion of a variable pertaining to victim injury could result in non-

significant blame scores between perpetrator genders for the gun condition. This explanation may account for the small effect sizes as well, as the threat of injury is less serious than actual injury. Further, common stereotypes associated with women, such as having a submissive and non-aggressive nature (Scarduzio et al., 2017) may account for lower blame scores. Since men are more socialized to aggression and violence, and since more serious IPV is committed by men (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000), participants may perceive the male perpetrator as more likely to carry out the threat with the weapon.

The hypothesis that in both perpetrator conditions, more blame would be placed when there is an external weapon present compared to when there is no weapon present was partially supported. The hypothesis that more blame would be assigned in the gun condition compared to the bottle and no weapon conditions was also partially supported. A perpetrator gender and weapon presence interaction was present, whereby the blame was attributed in the weapon conditions differently based on whether the perpetrator was a man or woman. In the female perpetrator condition, blame was highest for the gun condition, followed by the bottle, and then no weapon condition. Further, blame scores for all conditions were significantly different from one another. This is in line with previous research which indicates that the perceived threat of injury is associated with IPV attributions. In the male perpetrator condition a similar pattern was found where the gun condition produced the highest amount of blame, followed by the bottle, and then the no weapon condition. However, the no weapon condition was not significantly different from the bottle condition, and the bottle condition was not significantly different from the gun condition. When considering situational strength, the weapons used to threaten a victim by a female perpetrator may be more important than the fact that the perpetrator is female when determining blame. However, when the male is doing the threatening, the fact that the aggressor is male may be the larger driving force behind the attribution of blame. In addition, since the perceived threat of the weapon and not the use of the weapon was taken into account, and since victim injury is considered when observers make attributions of blame (Russell et al., 2016), it is possible that if the weapons were actually used in the scenarios the interaction between perpetrator gender and weapon would be eliminated.

4.1. Limitations and Future Research

The current analysis explored how weapons and their perceived harm influence third party observers' attributions of blame, without introducing the confound of actual injury. Despite

some interesting findings, limitations of the study should be taken into consideration. First, the sample was taken from a large Canadian university community, with the majority of participants being female undergraduate students. While there is a higher proportion of female students enrolled in Canadian universities (Turcotte, 2011; as cited in Wilson et al., 2019), the difference in participant genders could have impacted the overall findings. Additionally, academic settings often have education programs focused on violence prevention. This access to resources may differentiate university student attitudes from those outside of academia (Eigenberg & Policastro, 2015); however, the findings in this study are in line with previous community sample studies (e.g., Sorenson & Taylor, 2005). While this study did only focus on young-adult's perceptions towards IPV, their conceptualizations are still important to consider. It is around this time that many individuals enter into more serious romantic partnerships and develop norms and ideas about dating and relationships. As a result, this time remains ideal for necessary intervention (Kuijpers et al., 2017). Additional research in this area should examine older adult's views on gender and IPV. Langhinrichsen-Rohling et al. (2004) found that traditional sex-role beliefs were predictive of blame attribution. Therefore, it is possible that older adults may hold more traditional views which could produce different results than those presented with the younger sample. The age of the couple in the vignettes was not explicitly stated. Including a manipulation of age may produce interesting findings as a younger perpetrator, regardless of gender, may be thought to be more capable of inflicting injury on an older victim and thus be more blameworthy. The results of this study should be understood given the specific Canadian social context. Partner violence occurs worldwide, and societal conceptions of gender and how IPV is viewed vary in different cultures and religions. For example, in a patriarchal society IPV may be viewed as a legitimate tool for men to control their female partners. Thus, community attitudes may be more accepting towards the violence and thus place less blame on the perpetrator in the scenario.

The current study used vignettes depicting an IPV scenario with the addition of different weapons to convey the threat of perceived harm. The specific weapons and how they were inserted into the vignettes was reviewed by an expert committee to ensure they represented varying levels of harm. Future work should include specific manipulation test questions that measure how each weapon is perceived in terms of its ability to do harm. In order to get an idea of the attitudes held, vignettes depicting one instance of IPV were shown to participants. Episodic framing is also consistent with how the media portrays instances of IPV (Carlyle et al.,

2014). However, in reality IPV is an incredibly complex phenomenon and does not always occur in isolation (Stark, 2007). Future research should examine third-party observer attitudes towards more complex and ongoing forms of IPV that include coercive control and non-physical forms of violence. In addition, only a heterosexual couple was depicted in the vignettes. The gender dynamics between non-heterosexual couples are different than heterosexual couples. Therefore, future vignettes should include non-heterosexual couples to explore blame attribution and perceived injury, while also controlling for sexual minority biases (Allen & Bradley, 2017). While the aim of this project was to explore blame attribution in IPV, it would be beneficial to extend this research by examining how IPV attributions translate to real-world helping behaviour. The presence of a weapon in a scenario increases the seriousness of the situation; however, a bystander may also take into account their own safety before choosing how to intervene.

4.2. Implications

Making attributions about behaviour in partner violence based on gender and the threat of injury by a weapon has serious implications. Less injurious violence is often not taken as seriously as violence causing injury. As a result, initial warning signs and psychological abuse patterns may go unnoticed by IPV victims and their loved ones. Moreover, focusing on the ability to do damage to a victim based on a perpetrator's sex or gender is harmful. Violence done in non-heterosexual partnerships may not be taken as seriously due to existing ideas of IPV being considered more serious when the woman is the victim, and the man is the perpetrator. Assumptions stemming from stereotypes that women are weak, and men are strong and don't need help can have severe consequences for how resources are made available for IPV survivors. Regardless of the actual gender divides associated with violence perpetration, men and women both experience negative outcomes of IPV. In order to ensure that clinical realities match societal perceptions, research that focuses on factors that contribute to IPV observer attitudes should be expanded on. Continuous dialogue focused on IPV is critical, as it allows for the development of broader definitions of victimization and perpetration, while serving as a way to increase awareness of an issue that has historically been considered a private matter.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Demographic Questionnaire

If you are completing this survey through SONA please indicate your SONA ID, if recruited through another platform please leave this field blank.

SONA ID:

Instructions: Please answer the following demographic questions

1. What is your gender?

- a) Male
- b) Female
- c) 'You don't have an option that applies to me. I identify as ____

2. What is your age in years (please write in the box below):

3. How would you describe yourself? (select all that apply):

- a) Caucasian/White
- b) African/Black
- c) West Asian/Arab
- d) South Asian (Indian, Pakistani...)
- e) East/Southeast Asian (Chinese, Filipino...)
- f) Latin American/Hispanic
- g) Aboriginal (First Nations, Métis, Inuit, ...)
- h) Other (please specify):

4. What year of academic studies are you in?

- a) 1st year undergraduate
- b) 2nd year undergraduate
- c) 3rd year undergraduate
- d) 4th year undergraduate
- e) 1st year Master's
- f) 2nd year Master's
- g) 1st year PhD
- h) 2nd year PhD
- i) 3rd year PhD
- j) 4th year PhD

Other (please specify):

What is your relationship status?

- a) Single
- b) In a dating relationship

- c) Engaged
- d) Married

6. If you are currently in a relationship, how long have you been with your current partner?
___ years ___ months

7. In your life, do you feel that you have ever been a victim of intimate partner violence?

- a) Yes
- b) No

8. In your life, do you feel that you have ever been a perpetrator of intimate partner violence that was not in self-defense?

- a) Yes
- b) No

Appendix B

Vignettes Adapted from Rhatigan et al., 2011

Please **carefully** read the following scenario and answer the questions presented.

Scenario 1:

You are returning home from a full day of classes when you notice your neighbours in their kitchen through the open window. In the past, you have heard a lot of screaming and yelling coming from their house, so you wait and listen. You overhear the girlfriend, Maria, telling her boyfriend, Robert, that some girl called for him and hung up before she could take a message. She then asks who the girl might have been. Robert says, "I am not sure. It might have been someone from class today." She yells, "Drop the attitude! Tell me who the girl on the phone was or you'll be really sorry." You then witness Maria slap her boyfriend. Robert responds by holding his cheek, wincing in pain. Maria then yells, "You think that stings . . . Next time, it'll really hurt!"

Scenario 2:

You are returning home from a full day of classes when you notice your neighbours in their kitchen through the open window. In the past, you have heard a lot of screaming and yelling coming from their house, so you wait and listen. You overhear the boyfriend, Robert, telling his girlfriend, Maria, that some guy called for her and hung up before he could take a message. He then asks who the guy might have been. Maria says, "I am not sure. It might have been someone from class today." He yells, "Drop the attitude! Tell me who the guy on the phone was or you'll be really sorry." You then witness Robert slap his girlfriend. Maria responds by holding her cheek, wincing in pain. Robert then yells, "You think that stings . . . Next time, it'll really hurt!"

Scenario 3

You are returning home from a full day of classes when you notice your neighbours in their kitchen through the open window. In the past, you have heard a lot of screaming and yelling coming from their house, so you wait and listen. You overhear the girlfriend, Maria, telling her boyfriend, Robert, that some girl called for him and hung up before she could take a message. She then asks who the girl might have been. Robert says, "I am not sure. It might have been someone from class today." You see Maria reach for a drawer and pull out a gun. She yells, "Drop the attitude! Tell me who the girl on the phone was or you'll be really sorry." You then witness Maria slap her boyfriend. Robert responds by holding his cheek, wincing in pain. You witness Maria press the gun to Robert's chest and yell, "You think that stings . . . Next time, it'll really hurt!"

Scenario 4:

You are returning home from a full day of classes when you notice your neighbours in their kitchen through the open window. In the past, you have heard a lot of screaming and yelling coming from their house, so you wait and listen. You overhear the boyfriend, Robert, telling his girlfriend, Maria, that some guy called for her and hung up before he could take a message. He then asks who the guy might have been. Maria says, "I am not sure. It might have been someone from class today." You see Robert reach for a drawer and pull out a gun. He yells, "Drop the attitude! Tell me who the guy on the phone was or you'll be really sorry." You then witness Robert slap his girlfriend. Maria responds

by holding her cheek, wincing in pain. You witness Robert press the gun to Maria's chest and yell, "You think that stings . . . Next time, it'll really hurt!"

Scenario 5

You are returning home from a full day of classes when you notice your neighbours in their kitchen through the open window. In the past, you have heard a lot of screaming and yelling coming from their house, so you wait and listen. You overhear the girlfriend, Maria, telling her boyfriend, Robert, that some girl called for him and hung up before she could take a message. She then asks who the girl might have been. Robert says, "I am not sure. It might have been someone from class today." You see Maria reach for an empty glass bottle on the counter. She yells, "Drop the attitude! Tell me who the girl on the phone was or you'll be really sorry." You then witness Maria slap her boyfriend. Robert responds by holding his cheek, wincing in pain. You witness Maria smash the bottle on the counter and hold it up to Robert's face and yell, "You think that stings . . . Next time, it'll really hurt!"

Scenario 6:

You are returning home from a full day of classes when you notice your neighbours in their kitchen. In the past, you have heard a lot of screaming and yelling coming from their house, so you wait and listen. You overhear the boyfriend, Robert, telling his girlfriend, Maria, that some guy called for her and hung up before he could take a message. He then asks who the guy might have been. Maria says, "I am not sure. It might have been someone from class today." You see Robert reach for an empty glass bottle on the counter. He yells, "Drop the attitude! Tell me who the guy on the phone was or you'll be really sorry." You then witness Robert slap his girlfriend. Maria responds by holding her cheek, wincing in pain. You witness Robert smash the bottle on the counter and hold it up to Maria's face and yell, "You think that stings . . . Next time, it'll really hurt!"

Appendix C

Domestic Violence Blame Scale Adapted from Petretic-Jackson et al., 1994

(1=Strongly disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Somewhat disagree, 4=Somewhat agree, 5=Agree, 6=Strongly agree)

Situation Blame-Assigns blame for domestic violence to situational or contextual factors. Five items measure this concept:

1. Domestic violence more likely to occur in unstable homes.
2. Domestic violence more likely to occur in families with poor interpersonal relationships.
3. Abuse of alcohol and drugs causes domestic violence.
4. Domestic violence more likely to occur in slum or “bad” areas.
5. Domestic violence more likely to occur in families that are socially isolated.

Scores range from 1 to 5.

Perpetrator Blame-Belief that battering spouses or partners are mentally ill or psychologically disturbed and unable to control their violent behavior. This concept is measured by five statements:

1. Perpetrators who physically assaults their partners should be locked up.
2. Perpetrators who physically assaults their partners are mentally ill.
3. Domestic violence can be attributed to peculiarities of the perpetrator’s personality.
4. Perpetrators who physically assault their partner cannot control their violent behaviors.
5. Perpetrators who physically assault their partner had a dominant aggressive parent who also engaged in domestic violence

Scores range from 1 to 5.

Societal Blame-Assigns blame for domestic violence to societal values. Six items measure this concept:

1. Sex and violence in the media influence the perpetrator to physically assault their partner.
2. Domestic violence is the result of partners being regarded as property by society.
3. Domestic violence is a by-product of a male dominated society.
4. Society accepts domestic violence in marriage.
5. Marital stress increases the likelihood of domestic violence.
6. Society condones perpetrators physically striking their partners.

Scores range from 1 to 6.

Victim Blame-Assigns blame to the victim for either encouraging or provoking violence, deserving violence, or exaggerating the effects of domestic violence. Seven statements measure this concept.

1. Victims provoke domestic violence.
2. Victims encourage domestic violence by using bad judgement.
3. Domestic violence can be avoided by the victim trying harder to please the perpetrator.
4. Rise in women’s movement caused domestic violence.
5. Victims exaggerate the physical and psychological effects of domestic violence.
6. Society gives perpetrators the prerogative to strike their partners in their homes.
7. Victims deserve it

Scores range from 1 to 7.

Appendix D

Original Attributions for Violent Behaviour (Rhatigan et al., 2011)

(1=Strongly disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Somewhat disagree, 4=Somewhat agree, 5=Agree,
6=Strongly agree)

1.	(Perpetrator) is responsible for the violent act(s) portrayed above.	1	2	3	4	5	6
2.	(Perpetrator) deserves to be blamed for the violent act(s).	1	2	3	4	5	6
3.	(Victim) deserves to be blamed for the violent act(s).	1	2	3	4	5	6
4.	(Perpetrator) has an understandable excuse for their behavior.	1	2	3	4	5	6
5.	(Perpetrator's) behavior was rash and impulsive; they did NOT intend to harm their partner.	1	2	3	4	5	6
6.	I believe that (Perpetrator) understood that their behavior was wrong; yet they chose to behave in a violent manner.	1	2	3	4	5	6
7.	I believe that (Perpetrator's) behavior was a one-time event and won't happen again.	1	2	3	4	5	6
8.	(Perpetrator's) behavior was due to something about them (e.g., the type of person they are, the mood they were in).	1	2	3	4	5	6
9.	(Perpetrator's) behavior was purposeful and deliberate.	1	2	3	4	5	6
10.	I believe that (Perpetrator) will always behave violently in situations like this one.	1	2	3	4	5	6
11.	(Perpetrator) caused the violent acts(s) to occur.	1	2	3	4	5	6

Appendix E

Information Letter

Project Title: Perspectives on Intimate Partner Violence

Letter of Information

1. Invitation to Participate

As graduate or undergraduate students enrolled in a program at Western University you are invited to participate in this study concerning perspectives on intimate partner violence.

2. Purpose of the Letter

The purpose of this letter is to provide you with information that you need in order to make an informed decision on whether you would like to participate in this research.

3. Purpose of this Study

The purpose of this study is to examine how certain factors shape one's views on scenario's depicting intimate partner violence.

4. Inclusion Criteria

Graduate and undergraduate students who have access to the SONA system or have a Western email and attend the University of Western Ontario are eligible to participate in this study.

5. Exclusion Criteria

Individuals who have no affiliation with the University of Western Ontario, who do not have a Western email and who do not have permission to access the SONA system are not eligible to participate in this study.

6. Study Procedures

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to provide demographic information, after which you will be instructed to read 3 scenarios depicting a violent situation between a heterosexual couple. After each scenario you will be asked to fill out questions relating to each account. The study is anticipated to take approximately 15-20 minutes to complete.

7. Possible Risks and Harms

The scenarios depict interpersonal violence and may be uncomfortable and cause distress. Participants will be allowed to skip questions or exit the survey at any time if they feel discomfort.

8. Possible Benefits

Although you may not personally benefit from participating in this study, there may be benefits to the scientific community and society. This study aims to advance knowledge on understanding biases of bystanders to domestic violence.

Compensation

SONA participants will be compensated with 0.5 research credits for this study. Please consult your course outline for more information on research credit breakdown. This compensation amount is consistent with UWO policy.

9. Voluntary Participation

Participation in this study is voluntary and therefore you may discontinue participation at any time or refuse to answer any questions that makes you feel uncomfortable. If you choose to discontinue the study at any time, it will have no effect on your academic standing, and you will still receive your 0.5 credits if you are participating through SONA. Participants from SONA can request their data be removed from the study for the duration of the data collection period by contacting the research team. SONA IDs will be deleted after the data collection process is complete. Participants who were not recruited through SONA cannot have their data withdrawn once submitted as it is anonymous. You do not waive any legal right by agreeing to participate in this study.

10. Confidentiality

SONA IDs will be collected from those using the recruitment tool to ensure the appropriate credits are given. All data will be anonymous, should information be shared with other researchers or journals, data will be compiled before being presented. SONA IDs will be deleted after the data collection process is complete. The data will also be password-protected and stored on a secure computer. The data will be retained for a time-period of 7 years in accordance with UWO policy. Representatives of The University of Western Ontario's Non-Medical Research Ethics Board may require access to your study-related records to monitor the conduct of the research. Your survey responses will be collected anonymously through a secure online survey platform called Qualtrics. Qualtrics uses encryption technology and restricted access authorizations to protect all data collected. In addition, Western's Qualtrics server is in Ireland, where privacy standards are maintained under the European Union safe harbour framework. The data will then be exported from Qualtrics and securely stored on Western University's server.

11. Contacts for Further Information

If you require any further information regarding this research project or your participation in the study, please contact:

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant or the conduct of this study, you may contact The Office of Human Research Ethics

12. Publication

Your name will not be used if the results of the study are published, rather your data will be reported via group responses as opposed to individual responses.

13. Informed Consent

By responding to the online survey, you acknowledge that you:

- (1) understand to your satisfaction the information provided about the nature of this study and your participation in it
- (2) indicate your voluntary agreement to participate in this study

In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the investigators, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities.

I have read the Letter of Information, had the nature of the study explained to me and I agree to participate. All questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

YES- I agree to participate

NO- I do not agree to participate

You may print or save this letter for future reference.

Appendix F

Debrief Form

Perspectives on Intimate Partner Violence (IPV)

Thank you for participating in this study. The purpose of this study was to investigate how observer (participant) gender, perpetrator gender, weapon presence, and socioeconomic status influence perpetrator blame attribution in intimate partner violence.

The occurrence of gender asymmetry, referring to the real or perceived unequal status of the genders (Pepin, 2016; Wagner, Graells-Garrido, Garcia, & Menczer, 2016) in intimate partner violence has been studied in various contexts. In line with previous research findings (Stewart, Moore, Crone, DeFreitas, & Rhatigan, 2012; Sorenson & Taylor, 2005), observers of IPV (i.e., research participants reading vignettes) place more blame on male perpetrators than female perpetrators for the same offence. Male perpetrated IPV is accepted as a more widespread phenomenon in society (Burczycka, 2019). As a result, a pattern emerges whereby female perpetrators are blamed less when compared to their male counterparts.

A neglected area of IPV research is how perpetrator weapon use is connected to how one perceives gender and IPV perpetration. In order to address the research question “How does observer (participant) gender, perpetrator gender, and weapon presence influence perpetrator blame attribution in IPV?”, a vignette study was designed. Students were randomly placed into the male or female perpetrator condition. Each condition contained 3 weapon scenarios (no weapon, glass bottle, and gun). Taking into consideration previous research, several hypotheses were made:

H1: Male observers will assign less blame to the perpetrator compared to female observers, regardless of perpetrator gender or the presence of a weapon.

H2: Male perpetrators will be assigned greater blame than female perpetrators, regardless of observer gender or the presence of a weapon.

H3: Greater blame will be assigned to the perpetrator when there is a presence of a weapon compared to when no weapon is present, regardless of observer or perpetrator gender.

H4: Greater blame will be assigned to the perpetrator when there is a gun present, regardless of observer or perpetrator gender.

H5: Male perpetrators will be assigned greater blame than female perpetrators in the glass bottle condition, regardless of observer gender.

The questions and vignettes in this study may have caused some discomfort due to their violent nature. We thank you for your participation in this study, and if you feel you need to speak to a mental health professional or seek out a service provider some helpful links are included at the end of this letter.

Your responses are important to the advancement of knowledge for the literature on intimate partner violence and will help provide an understanding of implicit biases outsiders have when being exposed to violent scenarios.

Your participation is much appreciated. If you have any further questions about this research, please contact:

References

- Burczycka, M. (2019, December 12). Section 2: Police-reported intimate partner violence in Canada, 2018. Retrieved July 28, 2020, from <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/85-002-x/2019001/article/00018/02-eng.htm>
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- Sorenson, S. B., & Taylor, C. A. (2005). Female aggression toward male intimate partners: An examination of social norms in a community based sample. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 29, 78-96. Retrieved October 07, 2017.
- Stewart, C., Moore, T., Crone, T., DeFreitas, S. C., & Rhatigan, D. (2012). Who gets blamed for intimate partner violence? The relative contributions of perpetrator sex category, victim confrontation, and observer attitudes. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 27(18), 3739-3754. doi: 10.1177/0886260512447571
- Wagner, C., Graells-Garrido, E., Garcia, D., & Menczer, F. (2016). Women through the glass ceiling: Gender asymmetries in Wikipedia. *EPJ Data Science*, 5(1). doi:10.1140/epjds/s13688-016-0066-4

Helpful Resources:

Western Psychological Services: <https://www.uwo.ca/health/psych/index.html>

Western Health and Wellness Education Centre: <https://www.uwo.ca/health/> **International:** <http://www.suicide.org/international-suicide-hotlines.html>

Canada and the United States: <https://www.domesticshelters.org/>

Appendix G

Ethics Approval



Date: 6 August 2020

To: Dr. Donald Saklofske

Project ID: 116357

Study Title: Perspectives on Intimate Partner Violence

Short Title: Perspectives on IPV

Application Type: NMREB Initial Application

Review Type: Delegated

Full Board Reporting Date: September 4 2020

Date Approval Issued: 06/Aug/2020

REB Approval Expiry Date: 06/Aug/2021

Dear Dr. Donald Saklofske

The Western University Non-Medical Research Ethics Board (NMREB) has reviewed and approved the WREM application form for the above mentioned study, as of the date noted above. NMREB approval for this study remains valid until the expiry date noted above, conditional to timely submission and acceptance of NMREB Continuing Ethics Review.

This research study is to be conducted by the investigator noted above. All other required institutional approvals must also be obtained prior to the conduct of the study.

Documents Approved:

Document Name	Document Type	Document Date	Document Version
OnlineSurvey-DomesticViolenceBlameScale	Online Survey	11/Jul/2020	1
OnlineSurvey-AssessmentOfSadisticPersonality	Online Survey	11/Jul/2020	1
OnlineSurvey-BlameScale	Online Survey	11/Jul/2020	1
OnlineVignettes-IntimatePartnerViolenceScenarios	Online Survey	11/Jul/2020	1
MassEmailRecruitment, July 28 2020-V2	Recruitment Materials	28/Jul/2020	2
SONAParticipantRecruitmentV2	Recruitment Materials	28/Jul/2020	2
InformationLetter, July 28 2020-V2	Implied Consent/Assent	28/Jul/2020	2
OnlineSurvey-DemographicQuestionsV2	Online Survey	28/Jul/2020	2
DebriefingForm, July 28, 2020-V2	Debriefing document	28/Jul/2020	2

No deviations from, or changes to the protocol should be initiated without prior written approval from the NMREB, except when necessary to eliminate immediate hazard(s) to study participants or when the change(s) involves only administrative or logistical aspects of the trial.

The Western University NMREB operates in compliance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS2), the Ontario Personal Health Information Protection Act (PHIPA, 2004), and the applicable laws and regulations of Ontario. Members of the NMREB who are named as Investigators in research studies do not participate in discussions related to, nor vote on such studies when they are presented to the REB. The NMREB is registered with the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services under the IRB registration number IRB 00000941.

Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Kelly Patterson, Research Ethics Officer on behalf of Dr. Randal Graham, NMREB Chair

Note: This correspondence includes an electronic signature (validation and approval via an online system that is compliant with all regulations).



Date: 13 October 2020

To: Dr. Donald Saklofske

Project ID: 116357

Study Title: Perspectives on Intimate Partner Violence

Application Type: NMREB Amendment Form

Review Type: Delegated

Full Board Reporting Date: November 6 2020

Date Approval Issued: 13/Oct/2020

REB Approval Expiry Date: 06/Aug/2021

Dear Dr. Donald Saklofske,

The Western University Non-Medical Research Ethics Board (NMREB) has reviewed and approved the WREM application form for the amendment, as of the date noted above.

Documents Approved:

Document Name	Document Type	Document Date	Document Version
DebriefingForm, Oct 3 2020-V3 (2)	Written Consent/Assent	03/Oct/2020	3
InformationLetter, Oct 3 2020-V3	Written Consent/Assent	03/Oct/2020	3
SONAParticipantRecruitmentV3	Recruitment Materials	03/Oct/2020	3
MassEmailRecruitment, Oct 3 2020-V3	Recruitment Materials	03/Oct/2020	3
SESDescriptions, October 3 2020-V1	Recruitment Materials	03/Oct/2020	1

REB members involved in the research project do not participate in the review, discussion or decision.

The Western University NMREB operates in compliance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS2), the Ontario Personal Health Information Protection Act (PHIPA, 2004), and the applicable laws and regulations of Ontario. Members of the NMREB who are named as Investigators in research studies do not participate in discussions related to, nor vote on such studies when they are presented to the REB. The NMREB is registered with the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services under the IRB registration number IRB 00000941.

Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

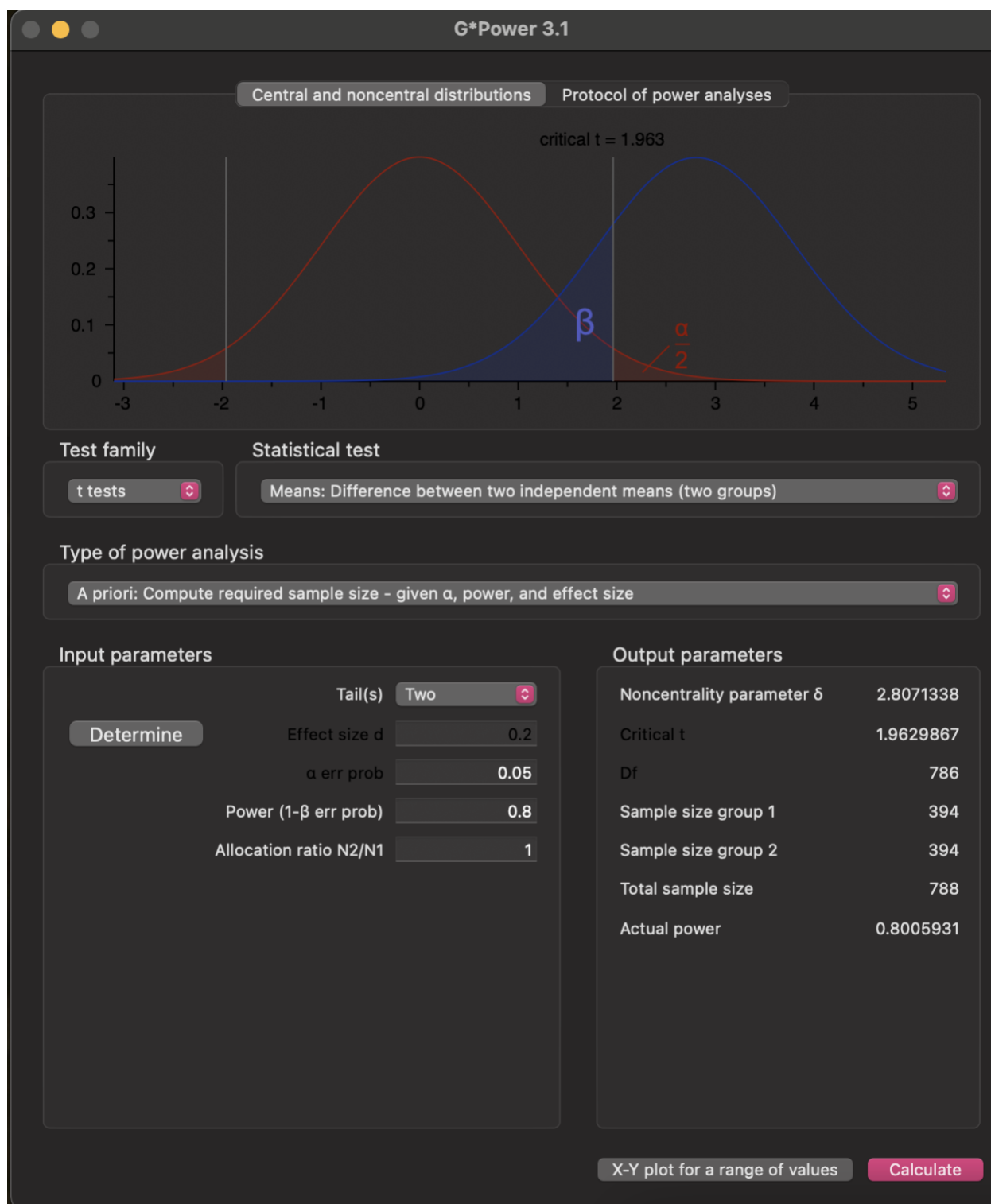
Kelly Patterson, Research Ethics Officer on behalf of Dr. Randal Graham, NMREB Chair

Note: This correspondence includes an electronic signature (validation and approval via an online system that is compliant with all regulations).

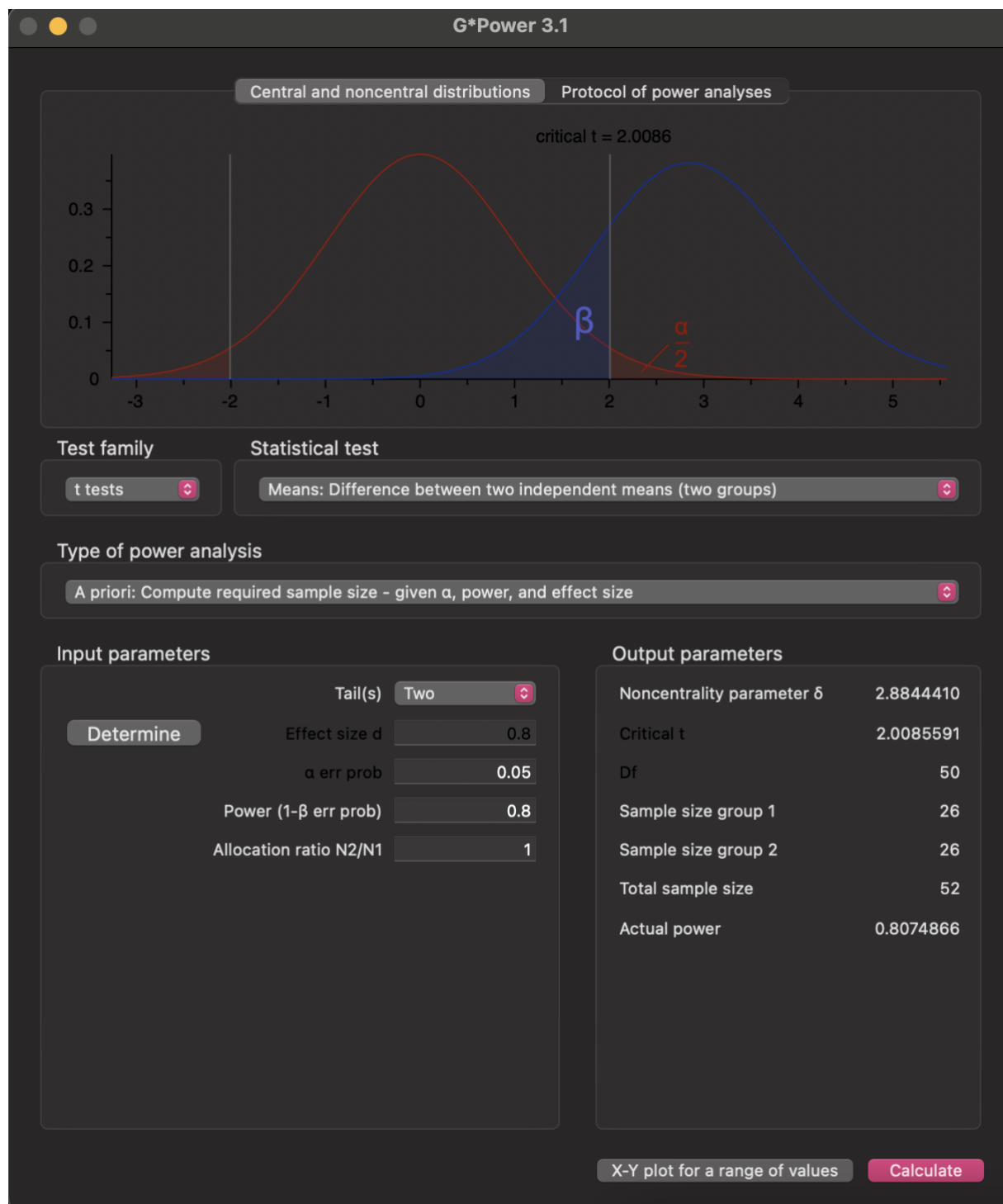
Appendix H

G*Power Analyses

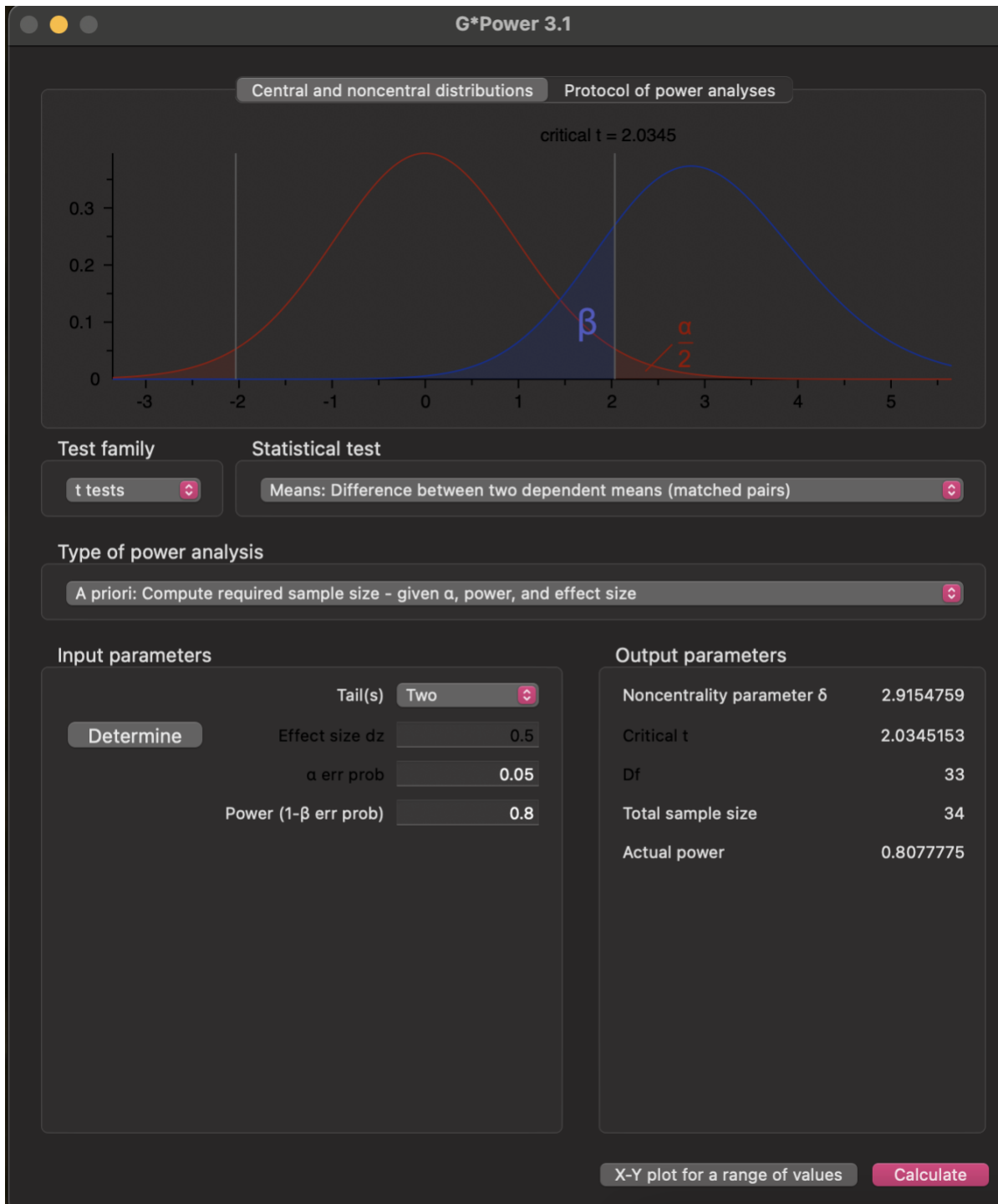
Observer Gender Main Effect



Perpetrator Gender Main Effect



Weapon Presence Main Effect



Curriculum Vitae

Malvika D'Costa

EDUCATION

Master of Science, Social Personality and Developmental Psychology

University of Western Ontario

2019-2021

Honours Bachelor of Applied Science in Psychology

The University of Guelph

2014-2018

General Arts and Science Diploma

Humber Institute of Technology and Advanced Learning

2014-2018

AWARDS AND DISTINCTIONS

Western Graduate Research Scholarship

University of Western Ontario

2019-2021

Degree with Distinction

The University of Guelph

2018

University of Guelph-Humber Entrance Scholarship [5,000]

The University of Guelph-Humber

2014

Academic Merit Scholarship [3,000 per year]

The University of Guelph-Humber

2015-2017

RELEVANT EXPERIENCE

Graduate Teaching Assistant

The University of Western Ontario

2019-2021

Research Assistant

The University of Western Ontario

2020-2021

Research Intern*Ontario Correctional Institute*

January 2018-September 2018

Research Assistant*The University of Guelph-Humber*

2016-2018

RESEARCH CONTRIBUTIONS**Conferences:**

D'Costa, M. & Crann, S. (2020). The influence of gender and weapon presence on blame in heterosexual intimate partner violence. [poster]. 81st Canadian Psychological Association Annual National Convention, Montréal, Quebec, Canada.